

## **WorkFirst Reexamination Workgroup**

### **Focus Area Briefing Paper**

#### **Issue: The Role and Contribution of Local Area Planning**

**Description:** Local Area Planning is a locally driven forum for the development of partnerships that operate WorkFirst at the community level. Membership in each of the 32 Local Planning Areas (LPAs) is determined locally and is made up of representatives from local and state agencies, community and technical colleges, nonprofit organizations, tribes, contractors and other community partners that serve WorkFirst parents. In addition, the geographical configuration of the LPA is determined locally. Pierce County, for example, is currently a Local Planning Area, but King County is segmented into six LPAs.

Each Local Planning Area is required by state statute to prepare an annual plan describing WorkFirst strategies that focuses on in the coming year. The plans direct partnership efforts to meet the needs of local WorkFirst families and WorkFirst performance measures. The plans are considered works in progress and are updated throughout the year to reflect the changing needs of the program and the families served. LPAs meet regularly throughout the year to review their plans and performance data, discuss program issues, strategize to improve outcomes, share best practices, and problem-solve issues.

Through this unique network, LPA members gain an increased awareness of local resources and expectations. Local Planning Area partnerships also work with other LPAs to share best practices to increase program outcomes and enhance service delivery.

**Cost:** \$300,000 per biennium is earmarked in the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development's WorkFirst budget to provide staff support (1 FTE) and technical assistance to LPAs. Much of this money (approximately \$168,000 in the last biennium) is passed along to LPAs for innovative projects, special initiatives, events, and training.

**Background:** Local Area Planning (initially called regional planning) is legislatively mandated, and was part of the original WorkFirst legislation in 1997. It was designed to empower local social services leaders from DSHS, ESD, the community colleges, and Community Jobs contractors, as well as other local organizations, to adapt the statewide program to achieve maximum effect for the WorkFirst families they serve in their community. Consulting with a myriad of other local entities, such as tribes, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) providers, housing authorities, economic development councils, workforce development councils, K-12 school districts, private and not for profit organizations, and employers has strengthened local service delivery.

#### **Benefits:**

- Empowers local WorkFirst leadership to tailor resources to meet unique needs of the families in their community
- Enhances communication, collaboration, and resource sharing among WorkFirst partners in local communities
- Encourages leveraging of local resources and services to meet WorkFirst family needs and program outcomes

- Fosters continuous program improvement and local innovation through grants coordinated through CTED. In 2005, nearly \$85,000 was made available to LPAs to support partnership, program performance and innovation. Special projects included ex-offender re-engagement training, assisting pregnant TANF mothers to stay motivated to work, TANF prevention programs for teens, cultural diversity training for employers and WorkFirst service delivery staff and drivers' re-licensing for WorkFirst participants.
- In FY 05 there was a 25 percent increase in the number of LPAs that met "Highly Functioning Area" criteria.

**Policy discussion:** At the local level, is Local Area Planning duplicative with WorkForce Development Councils (WDCs)? Are there benefits to having both? Are there efficiencies to be gained through integration?

Many of the LPA leadership members and local agency leadership have dual roles both at the LPA and on the WorkForce Development Council. This has benefited both groups by increasing their understanding and perspective of the needs in their communities. Some LPAs have tried to merge or integrate with their WDCs and found it difficult because of differences in their core missions. Those LPAs instead have opted for dual representation at both meetings, so that they can keep their unique focuses on the TANF population but gain perspective on the larger issues in the community.

Pros of merging WorkFirst Local Area Planning and WorkForce Development Councils	Cons of merging WorkFirst Local Area Planning and WorkForce Development Councils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ WDCs might reenergize the partnership and create some level of stability and accountability where previously LPA participation was limited.</li> <li>▪ If there were clear WorkFirst expectations of the WDCs and they could integrate the LPA partnership principles, mission, and goals, merging could benefit the entire community by allowing for greater collaboration, coordination, leveraging and planning for all people who need access to employment, skill development, training, and advancement.</li> <li>▪ WDCs are focused on work, training (up to 2 years), and wage progression/career ladders. Their focus is clearly "long-term" workforce development from both the employee and employer side. They are interested in the long-term sustainability and community vitality. This could include "self-sufficient" as defined by WorkFirst.</li> <li>▪ Integrating at a policy level with the mission of the WDCs, could, in fact, re-energize the message of "work" as the primary goal of the WorkFirst program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The ability to discuss specific TANF family needs (case staffings), and focus on service delivery methods for WorkFirst families would be difficult to maintain in the larger WDC arena, where the discussions tend to be on "bigger/broader" workforce training and education needs of low-income, dislocated, and incumbent workers in the community.</li> <li>▪ Flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to changing policy and program demands has been key to the performance and accountability of the WorkFirst program. The WDCs set their own local priorities and have specific procedures and bylaws dictating how they function, how decisions are made and how program resources are spent. Bottom line they have a tremendous amount of control. This kind of control could limit local WorkFirst program managers' ability to shift/leverage resources, adjust programs, or make service changes without WDC approval. LPAs have been able to adjust to changes</li> </ul>

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	<p>in policy and programs rather quickly once the information comes to them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Because the WDCs are a system unto themselves (self governed and state and federally mandated) this could pose challenges and perhaps a rift between the WDC focus and that of the WorkFirst program in general and specifically each agency's policies and leadership position.</li><li>▪ Trying to get local program changes made to reflect changes in policy could be difficult and require "negotiation" at both the local level and the state level.</li><li>▪ WDCs tend towards a "client directed" model, i.e. one that is less focused on special needs and barriers/issues of people.</li></ul>